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SIPDIS

STATE FOR INL AND SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/12/2019

TAGS: SNAR UZ PGOV PREL TX

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: UNODC SEEKING U.S. SUPPORT FOR
CROSS-BORDER COORDINATION PROJECT AT FARAP

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Project Coordinator for Turkmenistan, Ercan Saka, met with Political Officer yesterday seeking financial support from INL for a proposed project at Farap, on the Uzbek border. Under the proposal, which has a budget of one million USD and is divided into two phases, Saka envisions several major activities aimed at strengthening border control along Turkmenistan's main crossing to Uzbekistan. It mirrors UNODC's earlier cross-border project at Imam-Nazar, on the Afghan border, much of which was also supported with USG (INL) funding. (NOTE: US-CENTCOM is currently building a new border crossing station at Farap, similar to a facility constructed at Imam-Nazar. The Farap station is expected to be completed in May. END NOTE.)

¶12. (C) According to Saka, the project had an initial budget of USD 300,000, but the Turkmen authorities put forward a number of other activities they wished to include as part of it, particularly training programs, making the undertaking much more costly. Saka has thus far secured financial backing from the Turkish Government of USD 150,000. Turkey has reportedly promised to double that amount if UNODC obtains financial support for at least half of the total projected cost. The project would introduce modern interdiction methods, such as risk management, provide basic training on cross-border coordination to officials at the checkpoint, provide technical and training needs assessment, and establish a regular means of contact with Uzbek border authorities.

TURKMEN RELUCTANT TO COLLABORATE WITH THE UZBEKS

¶13. (C) Saka said that, in contrast to Turkmen officials' attitude towards working with Afghan officials on the Imam Nazar project, the Turkmen have been reluctant to commit to activities with Uzbek officials that involve information-sharing and other collaboration on border controls. In Saka's words, the Turkmen are more "ill at ease" towards the Uzbeks, whereas their interest in promoting stability in Afghanistan was a major impetus to working with officials from that country, as well as the fact that Afghanistan's population includes nearly four million ethnic Turkmen. He said the Turkmen are proud of the fact that the Afghan Turkmen have traditionally stayed away from

Afghanistan's internal struggles and have little or no connection to the Taliban. Only recently, he said, following President Berdimuhamedov's visit to Tashkent in February, Turkmen officials have shown more willingness to commit to activities with the Uzbeks. During the President's visit, several bilateral agreements on border security were signed.

INCOMPLETE SEIZURE DATA

14. (C) Saka said that Turkmen authorities have still not provided UNODC with their complete seizure statistics for 2008, only for the first six months. He has told SCNS that going ahead with the project at Farap will be contingent on their full disclosure of that information to his agency. He said that counter-narcotics officials, including Serdar Batyrov, the Acting SCNS chief, are reluctant to "stick their necks out" at the moment, fearing a reprimand or removal from the President, and thus have refused to provide the information.

15. (C) COMMENT: Narcotics trafficking is a regional, not local or national problem, and will only be effectively countered through cross border cooperation among the states that are part of the Afghan opiate transshipment route. UNODC has been effective in promoting counter-narcotics cooperation and training in Central Asia, and Post supports its proposed project at Farap. END COMMENT.

MILES